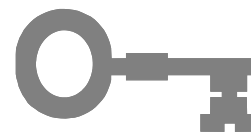


# DAN



## *Disability Awareness Newsletter*

*Knowledge, the Key to Understanding*

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Research, Education & Economics,

Winter 2000

**DAN encourages REE employees who have or are familiar with a disabling condition to share in future issues. Comments on content or suggestions for future issues may be forwarded to Sue Dixon, ARS, Civil Rights Staff, Rm. 3554-S, 1400 Independence Ave, SW. Washington, DC 20250. Phone: 202-690-0372; FAX: 202-690-0109; E-Mail: [sdixon@ars.usda.gov](mailto:sdixon@ars.usda.gov)**

### ARTHRITIS

It may begin as a slight morning stiffness. For the lucky person with arthritis, that's as far as it goes. But for millions of others, arthritis can become a disabling, even crippling, disease. Arthritis causes pain, swelling and changes in the joints that limit movement. Chances are that you or someone you know has arthritis.

Arthritis means joint inflammation. In a normal joint, where two bones meet, the ends are coated with cartilage, a smooth, slippery cushion that protects the bone and reduces friction during movement. A tough capsule lined with membrane seals the joint and produces a lubricating fluid. Ligaments surround and support each joint, connecting the bones and preventing excessive movement. Muscles attach to bone by tendons on each side of a joint. Inflammation can affect any of these tissues.

Inflammation is a complex process that causes swelling, redness, warmth, and pain. It's the body's natural response to injury and plays an important role in healing and fighting infection. Joint injury can be caused by trauma or by the wear and tear of aging. But in many forms of arthritis, injury is caused by the uncontrolled inflammation of autoimmune disease, in which the immune system attacks the body's own tissues. In severe cases, all joint tissues, even bone, can be damaged.

People of all ages may have arthritis. It affects one in every seven people. One in every three families has someone with arthritis.

Arthritis can come on slowly or suddenly and once you have arthritis, it usually lasts all of your life. However, many things can be done to help reduce pain, increase movement and keep you active.

There are more than 100 different types

of arthritis. Because there are so many types, there are likely to be many different causes. It may take time to find some kinds of arthritis, since symptoms develop slowly.

Osteoarthritis, fibromyalgia and rheumatoid arthritis are the most prevalent forms of arthritis. Rheumatoid arthritis, one of the most serious and disabling types of arthritis, affects an estimated 2.1 million Americans. Osteoarthritis, or degenerative joint disease, affects an estimated 20.7 million Americans, most of whom are over age 45. Fibromyalgia affects more than 2 million Americans.

Many things work to help control arthritis. Your care may involve more than one kind of treatment. It may change over time and vary for different kinds of arthritis. You and your doctor can work together to find the best treatment for you. Finding the right treatment takes time. It can involve trial and error until you find what works best. With the right treatment program, most people with arthritis can still lead active lives. Be sure to let your doctor know if a treatment is not working.

You may see or hear stories about different remedies to treat or cure arthritis. Some of these may be the result of new research. Others may be unproven remedies. If you are not sure about a treatment, check with your doctor. The key is early diagnosis and a treatment plan tailored to the needs of each individual. Doctors diagnose arthritis based on the overall pattern of symptoms, medical history, physical exam, x-rays, and lab tests. Most treatment programs include a combination of medication, exercise, rest, use of heat and cold, joint protection techniques, and sometimes surgery.

In the past, doctors often advised arthritis patients to rest and avoid exercise.

Rest remains important, but doing nothing results in weak muscles, stiff joints, and reduced mobility. Now, doctors routinely advise a balance of physical activity and rest. Exercise offers physical and psychological benefits that include improved overall fitness and well-being, increased mobility, and better sleep.

### **\* \* \* What Treatments Work? \* \* \***

Treatments for arthritis can be divided into several categories. You can take steps in each of these categories to help yourself feel better and move easier.

- ◆ **Medication:** Depends on the type of arthritis you have:
  - 1) Aspirin-free pain relievers
  - 2) Anti-inflammatory drugs
  - 3) Biologic agents
  - 4) Glucocorticoids
  - 5) Disease modifiers
  - 6) Sleep medications
- ◆ **Exercise:** Helps lessen pain, increase movement, and reduces fatigue.
  - 1) Range-of-motion exercises
  - 2) Strengthening exercises
  - 3) Endurance exercises
- ◆ **Heat and Cold:** May give short-term relief from pain and stiffness, also to prepare for exercise.
  - 1) Heat helps relax aching muscles.
  - 2) Cold numbs the area.
- ◆ **Pacing Activities:** Switch periods of activity with periods of rest. Helps protect your joints.
- ◆ **Joint Protection:** To avoid excess stress.
  - 1) Use larger or stronger joints
  - 2) Walking or assistive devices
  - 3) Weight Control
- ◆ **Surgery**
- ◆ **Self-Care Skills:** Understand your disease and know what to expect. Plan your activities, use problem solving methods to overcome difficulties.

### **\* \* \* Types of Arthritis \* \* \***

It is important to know which type of arthritis you have so you can treat it properly. Ask your doctor! Arthritis most often affects areas in or around joints, which are parts of the body where bones meet, such

as your knee. Different types of arthritis can affect one or more parts of a joint. This may result in a change of shape and alignment in the joints. Certain types of arthritis can also affect other parts of the body such as the skin and internal organs.

- ◆ **Osteoarthritis:** The most common, sometimes called degenerative arthritis. Usually affects the fingers and weight-bearing joints.
- ◆ **Rheumatoid Arthritis:** An abnormality in the body's defense or immune system causes inflammation of the joints beginning in the joint lining and then may damage both cartilage and bone. Often affects the same joints on both sides of the body. The hands, wrists, feet, knees, ankles.
- ◆ **Fibromyalgia:** Affects muscles and their attachments to bone. Widespread pain and tender joints.
- ◆ **Osteoporosis:** Causes bone to lose mass and become brittle, often leading to painful fractures and/or rounded shoulders and loss of weight.
- ◆ **Lupus:** Affects the skin and body tissues, and possible organs such as the kidneys, lungs or heart.
- ◆ **Gout:** Results when the body produces too much or is unable to rid itself of a natural substance called uric acid. This acid forms needlelike crystals in the joint
- ◆ **Bursitis and Tendinitis:** Result from irritation caused by injuring or overusing a joint. Bursitis affects a small sac that helps muscles move easily; tendinitis affects the tendons that attach muscle to bone.

There are many more types of arthritis and related conditions. The best advice is to see your health-care specialist early and follow a program to lessen the pain in order to continue normal activities.

### **\* \* \* Where to find help \* \* \***

The Arthritis Foundation has more than

150 local offices across the U.S. To find one near you call 800-283-7800.

P.O. Box 7669  
Atlanta, GA 30357-0669

Internet: [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)

**THE NEXT ISSUE OF 'DAN' WILL  
FOCUS ON MIGRAINE HEADACHE**

*The DAN will also appear on the  
ARS Civil Rights Staff Homepage.*